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## PRESIDENT TAFT'S VOLTE-FACE

BY THE EDITOR

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FOR more than half a century the Republican party has been the most compact and effective political organization this or any other democracy has ever known. Its principles have been affirmative, its policies audacious, its candidates, as a rule, aggressive. Even when it sprang into being as an opposition, in 1856, its attitude was invasive, its initial pronouncement positive, declaratory. Slavery, with polygamy, was "a twin relic of barbarism." This was the crux of the Frémont asseveration. Equally direct, though less vital, were: Kansas must be admitted. . . . The Pacific railroad must be built. . . . Harbors must be improved. These were not protestations against existing conditions; they were avowals of fixed and definite purpose.

There was no faltering, no paltering. In 1860 "the normal condition of all the territory of the United States" continued to be "that of freedom" and "all schemes for disunion" were held "in abhorrence." Upon that statement Abraham Lincoln was elected and the declaration was upheld by force of arms. Four years later, since "slavery was the cause and now constitutes the strength of the rebellion," the government was pledged "not to compromise with rebels, or to offer them any terms of peace, except such as may be based upon unconditional surrender." Again no sign of equivocation. Again the party won.

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So in 1868, when the stern, inflexible and unwise reconstruction policy was applauded and Andrew Johnson was condemned for acting "treacherously to the cause he was pledged to support," there was no yielding, no temporizing. Grant was elected.

The moral issue had played its part. Affirmation, aggression, audacity, had won easy victories. But the war was over. Passions engendered by strife were subsiding. Prosaic matters of revenue, taxation, expenditures, demanded attention. Promptly and fearlessly the Republican party responded, blazing a new way with the skill of intelligence, the determination of courage, the assurance of success. On the 5th day of June, 1872, in convention assembled, it promulgated this explicit doctrine:

"Revenue, except so much as may be derived from a tax upon tobacco and liquors, should be raised by duties upon importations, the details of which should be so adjusted as to aid in securing remunerative wages to labor, and *promote the industries*, prosperity, and growth of the whole country."

So entered Protection. A new cornerstone was substituted for the old. Upon it the massive structure has stood practically unshaken to this day. Reiterated in 1876 and 1880, the dogma found fuller expression in the platform of 1884:

"It is the first duty of a good government to protect the rights and *promote the interests* of its own people. The largest diversity of industry is most productive of general prosperity and of the comfort and independence of the people. We therefore demand that the imposition of duties on foreign imports shall be made, *not for revenue only*, but that, in raising the requisite revenues for the government, such duties shall be so levied as to *afford security to our diversified industries* and protection to the rights and wages of the laborers, to the end that active and intelligent labor, as well as capital, may have its just reward, and the laboring man his full share in the national prosperity."

The Republican candidate, not the Republican party, was defeated. Blaine, not Protection, was the issue. So the party descried and, in 1888, renewed its declaration of faith with pristine courage and sharp defiance. This, the forceful and pregnant utterance:

"We are uncompromisingly in favor of the American system of protection. We protest against its destruction, as proposed by the President and his party. They serve the interests of Europe; we will support the interests of America. We accept the issue, and confidently appeal to the people for their judgment. . . . We condemn the proposition of the Democratic party to place wool on the free list, and we insist that the duties

thereon shall be adjusted and maintained so as to furnish full and adequate protection to that industry."

Harrison was elected. Another triumph for affirmation and aggressiveness. Four years later the leaders wavered and substituted for the uncompromising declaration of 1888 these insipid words:

"We reaffirm the American doctrine of protection. We call attention to its growth abroad. We maintain that the prosperous condition of our country is largely due to the wise revenue legislation of the Republican Congress."

By contrast, pusillanimous. Harrison was defeated. Enter McKinley, the apostle of Protection, in 1896, upon this platform:

"We renew and *emphasize* our allegiance to the policy of protection as the *bulwark* of American industrial independence and the foundation of American development and prosperity."

Again in 1900 faith in the policy of Protection was "renewed" and McKinley was re-elected.

So, too, in 1904, under the guidance of the shrewdest of politicians, then occupying the White House, came this unfaltering declaration:

"Protection which guards and develops our industries is a *cardinal policy* of the Republican party. . . . We insist upon the maintenance of the principles of protection."

And in 1908, after promising revision, neither upward nor downward, an expansion of the doctrine thus:

"In all tariff legislation the true principle of protection is best maintained by the imposition of such duties as will equal the difference between the cost of production at home and abroad, *together with a reasonable profit to American industries.*"

The added phrase was clearly a virtual guaranty of profits to American manufacturers engaged in competition with foreigners—a step in advance of any proposal theretofore put forward in elucidation of Protection as a policy. And yet, so far from balking, the country elected Mr. Taft by an overwhelming majority.

What then do we find? Simply this: With Protection to *promote industries* as its "bulwark," its "cardinal policy," the Republican party has elected seven and installed eight Presidents out of the last ten chosen. Moreover, Tilden re-

ceived a majority of votes; not because of the tariff issue, but as a reformer, and Cleveland's victory over Blaine was purely personal. That the unpopular McKinley bill was largely responsible for Cleveland's second triumph there can be no doubt, but it is worthy of note that in that year, 1892, the Republican party lowered its Protection banner and, four years later, when it "emphasized" its devotion to "Protection as the bulwark of industrial independence," it won. No principle enunciated in the history of our country has been so steadfastly sustained by the people as Protection when stoutly upheld by the Republican party.

What now? Is the "bulwark" to be abandoned? Is the "cardinal policy" to be repudiated and discarded? What else can President Taft, the leader of his party, mean when he opens the door to competitive products, pronounces the duties on woolen goods indefensible and declares, as he is reported to have declared in a speech in Providence:

*"We must recognize that the time for the Chinese wall is gone. Before an industry receives protection now it must demonstrate the need of that protection, and it must not ask for more protection than it needs."*

Strange and noteworthy words, these! Confession, first; confession that, contrary to Republican insistence for a score of years, a "Chinese wall" has indeed been maintained by the Republican party. Confession, too, that industries have in fact received protection without demonstrating their need of it and have sought and obtained more protection than was required. But, humiliating as these admissions must be, they sink into insignificance when compared with the President's obvious abandonment of Protection as a cardinal principle designed to "promote industry," to the end "that active and intelligent labor, as well as capital, shall have its just reward."

How can Protection, under such restrictions, continue to be "not for revenue only," but "a bulwark of American industrial independence and the foundation of American development and prosperity"? It is, and has been since 1872, a first tenet of the Republican party that a new industry, in particular, should not be required to demonstrate its need of protection; the need has been assumed as a requisite to development. Nor, under Protection as a bulwark, can a manufacturer now profiting from exclusion of foreign products be forbidden or expected to ask for no more than he needs to keep his factories going, for the simple reason

that no margin would be left for that expansion which is regarded as the chief advantage of the protective system.

It is quite true, moreover, that a tariff designed to promote development must be "a harmonious whole," because of the great diversity and intertwining of specific industries. Consequently the proposed treaty with Canada does in fact, in the words of a Republican leader in Congress, make a breach in the wall of Protection which may prove irreparable; but, deplorable as this possibility may seem to supporters of the system, it need hardly be considered when contrasted with the President's proposal to tear down the wall itself. That, as we have said, presages complete renunciation of the one Republican policy which has been sustained by the people for nearly forty years.

That President Taft so understands and accepts the situation created by himself is clearly evidenced by his speech delivered in Indianapolis upon Independence Day. Defending himself against accusations of backsliding, he appealed to Blaine and McKinley as sponsors for his Canadian policy. The former, he declared, "attempted to secure an amendment to one of the tariff laws in which the subjects for reciprocity mentioned were articles in which foreign countries would compete with us in our own markets." He spoke truly, of course, but he refrained from adding that Blaine's action was not only not ratified, but was not even referred to by the Republican party in its next national convention. "More than this," he continued, "McKinley had negotiated a number of treaties in which duties were reduced or abolished on a number of products which would compete in our markets." But again Mr. Taft failed to note the fact that the Republican party, acting through its representatives in Congress, made but two minor agreements effective. He continued, however:

"The truth is, if you will read the last speech of McKinley, you will see that he speaks in this connection of duties which have become unnecessary and that might well be abolished. By that he meant duties which could be taken off commodities, foreign competition in which we could safely meet in our own markets."

Mr. McKinley may have meant such duties, but if so his language was surely less explicit than might have been expected. In his inaugural address, delivered but a few months before, he left no room for doubt. These were his words:

"The end in view must always be the opening up of new markets for the products of our country by granting concessions to the products of other lands that we *need and cannot produce ourselves* and which do not involve any loss of labor to our people, but tend to increase their employment."

This was in precise accord with the platform upon which McKinley was elected:

"We favor the associated policy of reciprocity, so directed as to open our markets on favorable terms for what we *do not ourselves produce* in return for free foreign markets."

With John Sherman's definition:

"To grant to foreign nations the reciprocal right of free importation into our ports of articles *which we cannot produce* in return for free introduction into foreign ports of articles of American production is reciprocity."

With President Arthur's message:

"The conditions of these treaties should be the free admission of such merchandise as this country *does not produce* in return for the admission free or under a favored scheme of duties of our own products."

And with the very definite declaration of principles set forth in the Republican campaign book of 1908, under President Taft's administration:

"*Republican reciprocity is reciprocity in non-competing articles, and nothing else.*"

To insist that aught else is now or ever has been accepted Republican doctrine is obviously futile. To argue that mere recommendations, not only never adopted, but ostentatiously ignored by the party, constitute an established tenet, is ridiculous. But in reaching for partisan authority Mr. Taft goes yet further by inference when he says:

"The Republican party in its last national platform declared in favor of tariff duties which would measure only the difference in the cost of production of articles here and of articles abroad."

The declaration to which he referred reads as follows:

"In all tariff legislation the true principle of protection is best maintained by the imposition of such duties as will equal the difference between the cost of production at home and abroad, *together with a reasonable profit to American industries.*"

This is very far removed from a pronouncement "in favor of tariff duties which would measure *only the difference in the cost of production* of articles here and of articles abroad." It is the quintessence of protection to American industries. Why did Mr. Taft omit all reference to those

pregnant words which safeguard the interests of home manufactures? Was it by inadvertence or because the asseveration does not accord with his conclusion, to wit:

"In other words, the sound Republican doctrine has become the imposition of duties only where the conditions are naturally unequal and where duties are necessary in order to enable our manufacturers and other producers to meet on a level the competition of foreign producers."

Not the "sound Republican doctrine" that "was" or "is" or ever has been, but that "has become." Since when? No such definition of the Republican party's "cardinal policy" ever appeared in a Republican platform or was ever uttered by an authorized Republican spokesman from Abraham Lincoln to William H. Taft until the Fourth of July in the present year of our Lord. It is a plain, unequivocal disavowal of Protection to American industries as a principle of the Republican party.

The question is: Will the Republican party follow its leader? Hasty minds have jumped to the conclusion that Mr. Taft's judgment has undergone material modification, if not, indeed, a distinct reversal, since he pronounced the present tariff measure the best ever enacted. But no such admission has come from his lips, and we perceive no reason for the assumption. It is far more likely that, feeling an obligation to his party to be heedful of public opinion, he recognizes the desirability of submitting temporarily to motives of expediency.

But whatever may be the real cause of Mr. Taft's seemingly heretical action, whether his change be of heart or of judgment, there can be no question that the Republican party, as a whole, is not yet a convert to low tariff policies. Protection is not merely its chief principle; it is its only one; quite as clearly the cornerstone of the structure to-day as at any previous time. Whether removal of the cornerstone now would leave the Republican party in a stronger position to win in either 1912 or 1916 than it would hold as a consequence of steadfast adherence to the doctrine which has been upheld by the people for nearly forty years is a question which the party itself must determine.

Can it be possible that President Taft has blundered and is leading the great Republican army into a quagmire of apostasy from which extrication can be achieved, if at all, only with the extremest difficulty?

THE EDITOR.